A STUDY OF THE REVIVAL IN LATE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

By Elmer F. Suderman

Edward Eggleston, writing in 1873 in the “Preface” to The Mystery of Metropolisville, insisted that the novel, while it must “be true to human nature in its permanent and essential qualities,” should also “truthfully represent some specific and temporary manifestation of human nature: that is, some form of society.” Wishing to portray correctly certain forms of American life and manners, he insisted that the work of the American novelist in his day was “to represent the forms and spirit of our own life, and thus free ourselves from habitual imitation of that which is foreign.” ¹ Part of a movement in literature in the direction of a truthful presentation of material and a portrayal of American characters in a dialect and language known by Americans, Eggleston did much to further in his novels his desire “to make a contribution to American civilization.” ²

In this paper I should like to take one aspect of the civilization of Eggleston’s time in which Methodists were especially involved—the revival meeting—and examine how he and his contemporary novelists treated it in the fiction of the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. My purpose in this study, based on twenty novels making use of revivals,³ will be to describe as accurately as possible the literary use which the American novelists made of the revival during the rise of American realism, and to assess the tone of the novelists in the hope that it will further our understanding of the significance of the revival meeting during this period. I hope this article will help readers to see more adequately the impulse of the novelist as he treats “conditions peculiar to our own land and climate” and as he deals with the life the novelist “knows best and for which he cares most.” ⁴

Revivals in the United States were held in many places and under varied circumstances in the nineteenth century. The revival meeting, which had been since the Cane Ridge, Kentucky, camp meeting, the principal technique for winning church members on the frontier, was still extensively used by most evangelical churches to the end of the century and beyond.⁵

¹ See the bibliography at the end of this article for a list of these novels.
⁴ Ibid, p. 7.
By the end of the century three different types of revivals could be distinguished: the frontier camp meeting; the indoor revival in the small communities, conducted sometimes by the local preacher but more often by an itinerant, often a professional revivalist; and urban mass evangelism brought to perfection by Dwight L. Moody in the 1870's and conducted by an expert. The novelists who dealt with the revival were, therefore, not dealing entirely with a phenomenon of the past, though they made most frequent use of the camp meeting, which had more or less disappeared by the end of the century, and least use of the urban revival, which had become a common type by the 1870's.

The frontier camp meeting, which had its rise and fall in the first forty years of the nineteenth century but which continued in many Methodist circuits at least into the 1840's and 1850's and even later, is treated by four of the novelists. Two of the camp meetings described are Methodist, the frontier camp meetings having become largely the property of the church of John Wesley. Edward Eggleston who had himself been a Methodist circuit-riding minister and later a pastor of small Methodist churches, described in The Circuit Rider, The Hoosier Schoolmaster, and Roxy Methodist camp meetings in Ohio and Indiana. In The Damnation of Theron Ware Harold Frederic depicted a Methodist camp meeting in New York state which occurred in the early 1890's. Camp meetings of other denominations are treated by W. D. Howells and Mark Twain. All of these writers draw on their own experiences. The camp meeting in The Leatherwood God occurs in the 1830's in Ohio, and the camp meeting in Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn takes place in Arkansas in the 1830's.

Influenced by the concern for local color in fiction, Twain, Eggleston, Howells, and Frederic set forth the scene in the camp meeting in careful and realistic detail: the spacious clearing in the forest, in the center of which was usually a roughly constructed, unpainted frame building; the horse shed behind it; the sheds with lemonade and gingerbread for sale; the piles of watermelon; the tents and wagons in which the people slept; the high platform for the preacher; the austere backless benches for the congregation; the mourners' bench; the big clusters of kerosene torches, hanging high in the trees, which in the darkness magnified the size and importance of what they illuminated; the sun-bonneted younger women; the older women with their knitting; the barefoot young men; the almost naked children and the young folks courting on the sly. 

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*a* Johnson, p. 242.  
*b* Ibid., p. 244.  
*c* Ibid., p. vii.  
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The novelists were realistic, too, about the social as well as the religious nature of the revival, especially in the camp meeting but also in the church revival. Students of the camp meeting have often called attention to its significance as a social experience in the almost barren life of the rural world of early nineteenth-century America. Isolated in sparsely settled areas, the frontiersman welcomed the relief from the monotony and drudgery of his life offered by what has been described as "the most mammoth picnic possible." The camp meeting with its chance of four whole days of preaching, praying, singing, eating and visiting together was a high point in the social life of the farmer.\(^{10}\) It was, of course, one of the few social events to which the young men might take their fiancées; it also gave the young people of the community an opportunity to meet and make love. Indeed, one old-time camper spoke of the camps as a "mating ground for the young."\(^{11}\) Harold Frederic reports that many people in the community regarded the yearly camp meeting "as perhaps the chief event of the year—no more to be missed than the county fair or the circus, and offering, from many points of view, more opportunities for genuine enjoyment than either."\(^{12}\)

The holiday air of the camp meeting was also a feature of revivals held indoors. Edward Eggleston, whose treatment of the revival is frank and usually impartial, points out that in a country village "where most of the time there is a stagnation even in gossip, where a wedding of any sort is a capital event, where a funeral is of universal interest, where even a birth is a matter of common talk, it is—all moral aspects of the case aside—a great thing to have a hurricane of excitement sweep over the still waters of the little pool."\(^{13}\) And a revival always stirred up excitement. Garland shows how the revivals held in the churches on the Middle Border had come to be, like the camp meetings, "an annual amusement like a circus and young people from all over the country drove down on Sundays, as if to some celebration with fireworks."\(^{14}\) During the revival, as Rose Terry Cooke shows, "the small gayeties of the town were suspended, shopmen closed their doors, fishermen left their nets to dry, farmers forgot their plowing for winter grain; men, women, and children poured into the church. . . ."\(^{15}\) The revival was

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\(^{10}\) Johnson, Chapter XL, "Sociability in the Tented Grove," pp. 208-299, deals with the subject.

\(^{11}\) Johnson, p. 210. The novelists do not, however, pay much attention to this aspect of the camp meeting.

\(^{12}\) Frederic, p. 192.

\(^{13}\) Edward Eggleston, Roxy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), p. 66.


\(^{15}\) Rose Terry Cooke, Steadfast: The Story of a Saint and a Sinner (Boston: Ticknor and Co., 1889), p. 218 ff. Cf. Presbyterian Robert Davidson who, writing in the 1840's, may have furnished Cooke with her information: "The Laborer quitted his task; Age snatched his crutch; Youth forgot his pastime; the plow was left in the furrow; the deer en-
a place where old friends met, where the latest gossip of the community could be exchanged.

As the nineteenth century advanced, as settled communities replaced the frontier, as improved means of transportation drew the communities closer together, as towns and church buildings multiplied, and as social life grew more varied and refined, the camp meeting dwindled. But the revival did not; it was simply taken indoors into homes, schoolhouses and churches, although the two types of revivals existed together. Edward Eggleston describes both types. In *The Circuit Rider* he describes the Methodist revivals in the settlers’ cabins on the Ohio frontier; in *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* he portrays a Methodist revival in a schoolhouse in Indiana. Hamlin Garland pictures the revivals in the ruder churches with their audience of women nursing querulous children—men and women separated by an aisle—of grim-looking men with grizzled faces, of men and women hardened with toil and poverty. Nor does he forget “the reek of stable-stained coats and boots, the smell of strong tobacco, the effluvia of many breaths,” so overpowering in the small overheated churches of the Middle Border.

Most of the revivals in the American novels of the last thirty years of the nineteenth century occur on the frontier or in the rural areas of the West. B. P. Moore’s description of a revival in *Endu’ra*, however, occurs in New England, though he describes it in much the same fashion as Garland. Rose Terry Cooke’s revival in *Steadfast: The Story of a Saint and a Sinner* also takes place in New England but is a relatively calm affair. Charles M. Sheldon pictures a number of revivals which occur in the usually staid Congregational churches of medium-sized cities in the Middle West. Though emotional, these revivals are considered salutary by Sheldon. The most famous of these is the revival in *In His Steps* which results in the vow taken by the converts to live their life as they think Jesus would have lived it. After taking the vow a number of the Rev. Henry Maxwell’s parishioners help out at the revival in the Triangle, a notorious slum area where they see brutal, coarse, vile lives transformed “into praying, rapturous lovers of Jesus.”

joyed a respite upon the mountains; business of all kinds was suspended; dwelling houses were deserted; whole neighborhoods were emptied; bold hunters and sober matrons, young women and maidens and little children, flocked to the common center of attraction; every difficulty was mounted, every risk ventured to be present at the camp meeting.” Quoted in Johnson, p. 51. Cooke, however, transfers the description from a camp meeting to a church revival.

11 Smith, p. 8.

17 Garland, *Other Main-Travelled Roads*, p. 22. See also Minot Judson Savage’s description in *Bluffton, A Story of Today* (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1887) of a revival in Ohio in somewhat more settled, yet essentially frontier, Ohio churches, pp. 11 ff.

18 *In His Steps* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1969), p. 76. In this and other novels Sheldon, unlike most of the other novelists, assumes that the revival not only saves individual souls but also the political, economic, and social life of a
treatment of a city revival, describes, not a Moody-type revival, but a street revival in New York City. Though sympatheic to the revival, Goss describes with some realistic detail the miserable and degraded women—some old, gray, and haggard; some young and covered with tinsel jewelry and flashy clothing; some middle-aged, wan, dispirited and carrying ill-fed and unloved infants crying in the night—and the vermin-covered, disease-devoured, hopeless men with their corpulent bodies, bull necks, double chins, pile-driving heads, shrunken frames, cadaverous cheeks who crowded around the evangelist.  

The novelists, then, described the camp meeting in the Mid-West and the indoor revivals in the Mid-West and New England in various denominations. We must now take some time to consider why these novelists ignored the most important type of revival of the time, the city revivals. That the novelists of the period do not describe revivals in the larger cities is particularly significant because it was during the 1870’s and 1880’s that Dwight L. Moody with the help of his song leader Ira D. Sankey seemed to be putting the devil to flight in the large cities of the United States. Other revivalists followed in his steps throughout the rest of the century. It is difficult to explain why the novelists ignored revivalism in the cities. While there was at that time and still is today a great difference in the evaluation of Moody’s real effect on the religious life of the United States, there is no doubt that he preached to large audiences and aroused considerable comment on his work; and whatever his effect may have been, he was a force in late nineteenth-century American religious life which could not be ignored. Yet the novelists did ignore him as well as other revivalists like him. George Arthur Dunlap argues that novelists did not treat Moody revivals in their fiction because they were “reluctant to write about living persons, and certainly these meetings could not have been adequately represented in fiction without bringing in the personalities of their leaders.” Perhaps nearer the truth is that these novelists who treated the revivals had firsthand acquaintance with rural and frontier revivals and consequently described what they knew best. Certainly a novelist like Eggleston—himself once a Methodist circuit rider—had not faced the problems of adapting old conversion techniques to modern urban conditions. Indeed, since most novelists...
viewed the revival critically, they could see no reason for adapting
the revival to modern conditions, for they would have agreed with
David C. Utter of Denver, Colorado, who in 1899 wrote that "the
old-fashioned revival is a thing of the past. The people of our coun-
try who are still young will have none of it." 22

The central figure of the revival, the evangelist, and his activities
are treated with realistic lack of charity. Even Eggleston and Gar-
land, who sympathetically portray the frontier revivalists, never-
theless often depict them with their inexhaustible breath and lungs
of leather, with their loud, strident voices which can be heard as
far as a mile away, with their see-sawing gestures, their nasal res-
onance, their sniffles, their melancholy minor key, their scurrilous
and ungrammatical attacks on members of other sects, as ignorant
men coming from all walks of life and seized by a religious spirit
which made them blazing torches of religious excitement sweeping
like a prairie fire the territory they invaded.

Yet Eggleston and Garland, undoubtedly describing the revival-
ists from their personal recollections, could not withhold their ad-
miration for the frontier evangelists. Garland's admiration is some-
what guarded, but his delineation of Elder Pill leaves no room to
doubt Garland's admiration for Pill's forthrightness, his pulpit
prowess, his vigor and strength, and his integrity. Eggleston's admi-
ration is less guarded, particularly in The Circuit Rider. In his
"Preface" to The Circuit Rider he asserts that "in the circuit rider,
as in no other class, was the heroic element so finely displayed" (p.
vi). Russell Bigelow in The Circuit Rider is short, inexpressibly
awkward, wears ill-fitting clothes, and has unkempt hair; yet "there
was a gentlemanliness about his address that indicated a man not
unaccustomed to good society," and his speech reveals a man of an
unusual degree of learning and culture. 23 The Presiding Elder
Magruder's sermons may be crude and vulgar, but his presentation
of the mercy and the judgment of God is effective. Eggleston loving-
ly traces the self-sacrificing career of Hezekiah Lumsden from his
conversion through his first halting attempts to preach, his persist-
ence in serving his circuit in spite of increasing illness, and his
renunciation of his one great love, to his saint-like death in a scene
which is filled with pathos but avoids—very narrowly, however—
the sentimentality of the common deathbed scenes of the religious
novel.

Morton Goodwin the hero of The Circuit Rider, has the unquali-
fied admiration of Eggleston. He is not presented, as the frontier
historians often described the typical circuit rider, as steely-eyed

22 "The Passing of the Revivalist,"
Arena, XXI (Jan., 1899), 107.
That circuit riders were often men of cul-
ture is made clear in Johnson, who
points, among others, to James B. Finley,
a classical scholar and professor of lan-
guages at Augustana College (p. 153).
with gray and relentless expression, wholly somber, humorless, "deolorably ignorant, bitterly sectarian and wildly fanatical." In- stead, like Peter Cartwright, he has the irrepressible good humor which makes it possible for him to enjoy a good joke, especially at the expense of the disreputable elements which often plagued the camp meetings. Though Morton shares a "striking characteristic of the frontier minister, . . . lack of formal education," he is not ignorant. He learns from other Methodist ministers. He reads John Wesley and the Bible, and most of all he learns from the "larger school of life and practical observation," and finds the "peculiar abode of the Almighty" in the "primeval forest." What he lacks in formal training and instruction he makes up in moral earnestness. Yet for all this Morton is quite capable of falling in love and marry- ing the most beautiful girl on the frontier.

Even Harold Frederic, who is sharply critical of the revivalist, cannot help admiring the skill, though not the matter of Sister Soulsby, who is, incidentally, the only woman revivalist described in the American religious novel of the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Sister Soulsby is not a camp meeting revivalist but a professional whose sole business it is to convert souls and balance the budget in the small town Methodist churches in the state of New York. While dubiously ethical, her methods are extremely effective. If one does not concentrate on what she says, one cannot help being impressed, Frederic feels, with the "splendid, searching sweep of her great eyes; the vibrating roll of her voice, now full of tears, now scornful, now boldly, jubilantly triumphant; [with] the sympathetic swaying of her willowy figure under the stress of her eloquence." 28

Minot Judson Savage, a Unitarian, could not, however, in any way share the admiration of Eggleston, Garland, and Frederic. Perhaps Savage's own terror as a result of his parents' interest in revivalism and his own conversion at age thirteen at a revival after six weeks of "horror and fear of hell" explains, at least in part, his disgust at the ridiculous figure cut by the revivalists as he stands before a Methodist Preachers' meeting, but because of protests the invitation had to be withdrawn. A prominent preacher argued that "bringing women as preachers and desiring to hear them preach is an aberration of amative-ness." See Garrison, p. 70. The situation had changed somewhat by 1896. Maggie Van Cott, the first woman to be licensed to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church, began her ministry of evangelism in 1869. See McLoughlin, p. 158.

24 Johnson, pp. 145-146.
25 Ibid., p. 151.
27 The feminist movement, despite its increasing strength, had not aroused much interest in the churches. The attitude of the churches toward women preachers is evident in the fact that in 1877 a Presbyterian minister by the name of See was brought to trial and convicted by his Presbytery for allowing two women to preach in his church. Two months later a Miss Oliver was invited to preach before a Methodist Preachers' meeting, but because of protests the invitation had to be withdrawn. A prominent preacher argued that "bringing women as preachers and desiring to hear them preach is an aberration of amative-ness." See Garrison, p. 70. The situation had changed somewhat by 1896. Maggie Van Cott, the first woman to be licensed to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church, began her ministry of evangelism in 1869. See McLoughlin, p. 158.
28 Frederic, p. 132.
29 DAB, XVI, 389.
inside the altar of the small town church with a glowing and exultant face, rubbing and occasionally clapping his hands, preaching with great unction a sermon on the topic, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" 30 B. P. Moore in *Endure* is also critical of the rabid, hysterical actions of the professional revivalists who lose all sense of decorum when they preach. 31

Another aspect of the revivals frequently described by American novelists was the hysterical nature of the call to repentance, particularly in the frontier camp meetings. Whether sympathetic or unsympathetic to the revivalists, all of the authors were aware of the tremendous success of the revival preachers in stirring up the emotionally starved congregation. The sermon often consisted of little more than a sequence of only tenuously related Scripture quotations 32 or of a "blazing, clanging, reiteration of worn phrases." 33 Mark Twain depicts such a sermon at the revival Huck Finn attends: "Oh, come to the mourners' bench! come, black with sin! (amen!) Come, sick and sore! (amen!) ... come with a broken spirit! Come with a contrite heart! ... the waters that cleanse are free." 34

Often the preacher spent much of his time picturing, sinners-in-the-hands-of-an-angry-God fashion, the tortures of hell prepared for those who would not heed the call to repentance. Elder Pill's sermon is typical. Stopping suddenly and pointing above the stovepipe, he said:

"I tell you, you must repent or die. I can see the great judgment angel now! I can see him as he stands weighing you souls as a man 'ud weigh wheat and chaff. Wheat goes into the Father's garner; chaff is blown to hell's devouring flame! I can see him now! He siezes a poor, damned, struggling soul by the neck, he holds him over the flaming forge of *hell* till his bones melt like wax; he shrivels like thread in the flame of a candle; he is nothing but a charred husk, and the angel flings him back into outer darkness; life was not in him." 35

Such appeals soon brought sinners under conviction to the

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30 Savage, p. 100.
31 B. P. Moore, *Endure: Or Three Generations* (San Francisco: Golden Age Company, 1890), p. 117. No biography of Moore and no statement of his religious position has been found, though the tenor of his book is liberal and it expresses views similar to those found in the Unitarian Minot Judson Savage.
33 Garland, *Other Main-Travelled Roads*, p. 70.
34 Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, p. 131.
35 Garland, *Other Main-Travelled Roads*, pp. 45-46. See Johnson, p. 171 et passim, who says that "Hades could be conjured up for the wicked so vividly by Western orators that the strongest men would tremble and quake imagining a lake of fire and brimstone yawning to overwhelm them and the hand of the Almighty thrusting them down the horrible abyss."
mourners' bench, often in large numbers, where they would weep and pray for mercy. Mark Twain has Huck Finn describe those, who, under conviction, go to the mourners' bench with tears running down their faces, singing, shouting, and flinging themselves down on the straw, "just crazy and wild." The scene after the call to repentance has been given was often one in which the sobs and moans and hysterical murmurings of the penitents were raised to barbaric heights. The chaos became a "demonical chorus of yells, songs, incantations, shrieks, groans, and prayers." Only the most hardy could resist the hypnotic conditions. Careless or mischievous young people, coming to observe, perhaps even to jeer, felt the spell of the revival clamped upon them. Occult forces seemed to take control of them and drag them forward as in a dream to the benches under the pulpit where they would abase themselves like worms in the dust. Physical manifestations were not uncommon. Penitents would leap in the air and scream, burst forth into maniacal laughter, foam at the mouth, succumb to the "jerks," and finally subside in a cataleptic fit.

The emotional orgy not only of those under conviction but also of those who, already of the elect, "bellow out their praise with almost barbaric license" is also realistically described by these novelists. Savage describes Brother Baker's procedure when asked to pray at a revival. He begins in a tone so low that he cannot be heard two pews away. But Brother Baker is not disturbed, for as he warms up his voice keeps on rising and swaying until he fairly shrieks and screams in his vehemence for the Lord to wake up the poor sinners who are dropping into hell. His voice becomes nothing less than a yell, and he can be heard above the prayers of other volunteers who have taken up his plea for the lost souls in the congregation. Gasping for breath, his hands clutching the seat, the perspiration rolling from his forehead, Baker's every word is a gasp and between each gasp are interjected syllables on which he seems to rest for an instant while catching his breath for a still higher scream. Finally, when Baker has no more breath left, with one wild shriek, he gasps out an "Amen!" and rolls over on the floor. Howells in The Leatherwood God has Abel Reverdy tell Squire Braile how the participants of the revival were going lively about midnight, "whoopun' and yellun', and ripun' and stavun', and fallun' down with the jerks, and pullun' and haulun' at the sinners, to get

26 Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 131.
27 Garland, Other Main-Travelled Roads, p. 74.
28 Frederic, p. 193.
29 See Johnson, pp. 57-66, for a careful description of the many kinds of physical manifestations present at the earlier camp meetings. These excesses were deplored by many of the preachers, though others aided them; as the camp meeting matured the frenzy was reduced.
30 Frederic, p. 192.
31 Savage, pp. 100-102.
'em up to the mourners' bench, and hurrahun' over 'em, as fast as they was knocked down and drug out." 42

In their attitudes toward the revival the novelists differ. Eggleston believed that even the frontiersmen responded more readily to a religion of love and good works than to the fear of damnation in a fiery hell. Bud Means in The Hoosier Schoolmaster tells Mr. Hartsook how he had attended a revival. On the first night he heard a man talk about Jesus Christ in such a way that he wanted to follow him everywhere, even though he did not feel worthy. Having made up his mind to try Jesus Christ, he went back the next night only to hear a big man preach about hell in such an irritating way that he became angry. Not that he did not believe in hell and that there were not men—himself included—who deserve it, but the preacher so angered him that he decided that even in hell God could never make him give in. "The preacher was so insultin' with his way of doin' it. He seemed to be kind of glad that we was to be damned, and he preached somethin' like some folks swears. It didn't sound a bit like the Christ the little man preached about the night afore." 43 Ralph Hartsook, however, informs Bud that he does not have to have a violent conversion experience to be a Christian; all he needs to do is to put in his "best licks" for Jesus Christ, and God will do the rest.

Yet Eggleston was not willing to say that the revivals had no permanent effect on the lives of the people. The fact that many who, living half a century later, "counted their better living from the hour of [Magruder's] forceful presentation of God's antagonism to sin and God's tender mercy for the sinner" cannot be lightly ignored. The earnest and forceful preaching of these dedicated men and their warfare against the evils of drink, gambling, dancing, and ostentatious clothing—evils which Eggleston recognizes as being unimportant—were not in vain in civilizing the frontier, Eggleston felt. Even Mr. Sodom, who "could never preach without his brimstone wallet," had his place on the frontier; for "a religion without fear could never have evangelized or civilized the West, which at one time bade fare to become a perdition as bad as any that brother Sodom ever predicted." 44 "More than any one else, the early circuit preacher brought order out of this chaos," Eggleston said in his "Preface" to The Circuit Rider (p. vi). Eggleston's evaluation of the necessity for and effect of the sometimes strong medicine of the circuit riders is shared today by historians of the camp meeting. 45

Other novelists were sympathetic to the revivals in the churches. John Bamford, Rose Terry Cooke, C. F. Goss, and Charles M. Sheldon do not, at least intentionally, prejudice the reader against

42 Howells, p. 7.
44 Ibid., p. 195.
45 Johnson, p. 170, et passim.
the revival. Bamford does not even bother to defend it; he merely takes it for granted as the way in which the church gains members. Cooke does not depict a full-blown revival, but she appears sympathetic. Sheldon is not as complete in his description of a revival as a novelist like Eggleston, but he does defend them. While the revivals of Sheldon are not rowdy, they are emotional, but it is an emotion which is based on an appeal to full discipleship, rather than on fear of eternal damnation. Emotion, Sheldon feels, is important for religion. The congregation at First Church in Raymond had not really known religion when they worshiped in the "regular, cold, conventional order of service, undisturbed by any vulgar emotion and unmoved by any foolish excitement." Only when they experienced a baptism of tears, did they really experience the meaning of true religion.46

On the whole, however, the novelists, even those who considered themselves within the Christian tradition, indict the revival for its excessive emotionalism, its ineffectiveness in changing men's lives, and its corruption. One of the most stringent criticisms was against the excessive emotionalism generated at the revivals. Novelists like Holland, Eggleston, Twain, Moore, Howe and Kirkland condemned the emotionalism of the revivals with their emphasis upon fear and damnation. The conception of Christianity upon which the revival was based, these novelists see as cramped and mean, and the methods of conducting the revival, based as they were upon a fervent appeal to the emotions of men, they considered as unwise and unworthy of Christianity. Mark Forrest, the liberal young minister in Savage's Bluffton, the Reverend Charles Whittaker, the Presbyterian minister in Eggleston's Roxy, Mr. Bradford the liberal layman in Josiah Holland's Arthur Bonnicastle, Huck Finn, Anne Sparrow in Joseph Kirkland's Zury—all object to the revival as a method of importing the Holy Ghost. They are appalled at the strange hullabaloo, the noisy confusion, the meaningless shouting of pious phrases which they hear at the revivals they attend. The irreverence of the whole affair offends their prejudices, grates on their sense of propriety, and fills them with disgust. They regret that revivalism with its emphasis upon personally experienced and highly emotional religion is the only kind of Christianity available to many Americans, especially in the Middle West. They see little good coming from the revivals. The usual result, they feel, is that the emotional fervor subsides when the revival is over, and the artificial excitement induced by it raises no church out of religious indifference but produces only an exhaustion and a deeper indifference afterward, leaving no effect either on the character of the individual or upon the corporate life of the community.

46 Sheldon, In His Steps, p. 95.
Josiah Holland, particularly, points out that a highly emotional conversion experience often leaves the converted individual weaker instead of stronger. Arthur Bonnicastle finds his feelings of joy after his conversion at a revival short-lived and discovers that these feelings have not really helped to overcome temptation. After his conversion, he goes to visit some school friends in New York City and disgraces himself by taking a drink—something he had never done before—and getting thoroughly drunk. He agrees with Mr. Bradford, his old friend, that his conversion had not strengthened but weakened him. His conversion had interrupted and ruined the processes of Christian nurture through religious education, which, Mr. Bradford held, was the only way to become Christian. Mr. Bradford objects to the revivalist’s assumption that human nature is without variety, and that the same method will appeal to the imbruted, the ignorant, the vicious, the stolid, the sensitive, the delicate, the weak and the strong, the young and the old. Holland has Mr. Bradford argue, as Horace Bushnell had argued in 1847 in \textit{Christian Nurture}, that the hope of the Christian church lies not in the exceptional agencies of the revival but in the Christian nurture of children. True Christian beginnings, Holland insists, as did Bushnell, do not originate at a special, dated, dramatic conversion experience, but in the religious education of the child which begins at birth and which must continue throughout life. The labor expended upon revivals should be spread, Holland feels, evenly over a greater period of time and applied with never-flagging persistency to the shaping and nurture of the plastic and docile minds of the young. Only then will the Christian kingdom increase in numbers and advance in power by a progress at once natural, healthy, and irresistible.

While Holland expresses his criticism directly, Mark Twain makes use of humor in objecting to the emotionally charged fervor of the revival and in indicating his preference for the more reasonable worship of the Presbyterians, who never rant, tear up the ground, and go crazy over religion as the new Wildcat Religions of the West do. He prefers the Presbyterian way of subsiding into solemnity upon entering the church, of listening quietly to the hired choir singing, and of sitting silently and gravely—though perhaps catching a few flies surreptitiously—while the minister is preaching. The greatest excitement shown by the Presbyterians, Twain adds, is

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47 Holland, who became in 1870 the first editor of \textit{Scribner's Monthly}, has often been mistaken for a clergyman because his fiction suffers from too much preaching.


when they hurry off, perhaps even pushing a little, after the minister has pronounced the benediction. If one must attend religious services at all, Twain prefers the perfect serenity, the lack of frenzy and fanaticism of the Presbyterians, who do not, like the New Wildcat Religions of the West, get into a sweat about their religion and try to massacre their believing neighbors.50

On occasion, the American novelists, then, grudgingly admired the moral fervor of the evangelist, especially the circuit riding preacher. With Eggleston they recognized that strong measures were sometimes necessary for frontier conditions. But also with Eggleston they generally felt that the revival, though it may have been worthwhile under frontier conditions was ineffective in a more settled America. McLoughlin's comment that by 1875 almost all opposition to professional revivalism had died out and that the annual revival conducted by an itinerant specialist was an integral part of evangelical church life in America,51 would certainly not have been accepted by most of the novelists who wrote about the revival, though John Bamford and Charles M. Sheldon, both ministers of churches, did accept the revival as a viable technique. The non-clergymen were more aware of the inadequacies of the revival in changing men's lives and in changing the society in which men lived. Not particularly interested in man's eternal salvation or in church membership, novelists like Twain, Howells and even Eggleston were critical because revivalism too often had no perceptible effect on a man's character.

But the novelists did describe realistically the various kinds of American revival meetings. Through their eyes we see with considerable clarity not only the physical details of the revival but also the feelings and attitudes of the participants, including congregations and preachers.

Indeed, if one examines the use which major American novelists made of the revival—and it is surprising how many of the best novelists describe revival scenes—Twain, Howells, Frederic, Kirkland, Eggleston—one can only conclude that these novelists elected to treat the subject primarily because it gave them an opportunity, not, as Eggleston said, to glorify a group or defend or even criticize a practice, but to tell the truth "by writing truly of men as they are, and dispassionately of those forms of life that come within his scope." 52 The revival, an integral part of the experiences of Twain, Howells, Frederic and others, gave them an opportunity to represent and to use as a background for their fiction a phenomenon that was particularly American. In short, the revival gave American novelists an opportunity to help their readers see clearly, and often from a new perspective, an aspect of their common experience.

51 McLoughlin, p. 152.
52 The Circuit Rider, p. vii.
Bibliography


